

For Rae Centennial Celebrations

SOMMAIRE

Les fêtes du Centenaire de la Mission Saint-Michel au Fort Rae ont eu lieu du 11 au 13 juillet 1959. Blancs et Indiens de la région affluèrent à l'historique mission. L'avion du vicariat, le CF-OMI, piloté par le R.P. LEISING, y amena S. Exc. Mgr Paul PICHÉ, qui célébra une Messe pontificale et confirma 21 enfants de la mission. Des Cérémonies impressionnantes se déroulèrent à la Mission même, aux différents sanctuaires de la région, au cimetière de la Mission et au Vieux Fort à l'endroit même où a été célébrée la première messe il y a cent ans. Enfin de grandes réjouissances marquèrent le Centenaire, occasionnant de profitables rencontres entre le peuple et les missionnaires.

On Friday afternoon, July 10, about thirty boats came to Yellowknife and Trout Rock, bringing people to attend the Centennial Celebrations. Upon arrival, Chief Sansgris and his people were greeted with a rifle salute, which they in turn acknowledged. The people immediately hurried over to greet old friends and relatives, and several hundred, eager to welcome the visitors, soon filled the ground around the mission.

The celebration of the Centennial of St. Michael's Mission of Fort Rae officially began on Saturday, July 11, with Solemn High Mass. Said outside in front of the church, the Mass was sung by Rev. Father DUCHAUSSOIS, superior of St. Michael's. The sermon preached by Rev. Father POCHAT explained the significance of these centennial

celebration. After Mass, Chief Jimmy BRUNEAU and Chief Sansgris each gave a short greeting to the people.

About noon, the mission aircraft, the CF-OM1, flew over, bringing his Excellency Bishop PICHÉ, who was greeted in traditional manner by a rifle salute and pealing bells. As everyone gathered to welcome his Excellency, a receiving line several persons deep, stretching from the shore to the church, was quickly formed and the good Bishop took some time to make his way to the church where a brief prayer was offered before the congregation dispersed. Souvenir ribbons were distributed at this time. At 4 p.m., His Excellency administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to twenty-one local boys and girls. As it had become very windy, this impressive ceremony was held inside the church which was absolutely filled. His Lordship was heard to remark later, that he had never seen a church so full of people. Following the Confirmation ceremony, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was given by the Bishop.

On Sunday, July 12, parish Communion was held at 7:30 a.m. At 10 a.m., a Pontifical High Mass was sung, again outside, by His Excellency Bishop PICHÉ, assisted by Father BEAUREGARD and Father MARREC. Rev. Father DUCHAUSSOIS as master of ceremonies directed movements of the eleven altar boys who were dressed in special white cassocks fashioned like monks' robes. The sermon was preached by Bishop PICHÉ in which he outlined briefly the past 100 years of Christianity in the Dog-Rib country and urged the people to build as well in the next 100 years. The Bishop relayed a message from Pope John XXIII to the people of Fort Rae for this special occasion, then bestowed the pontifical blessing upon the congregation. Several girls and boys made their First Holy Communion at this Mass.

At 3 p.m., Benediction was held outside followed by a procession to Our Lady's shrine, erected to mark this centennial year, where dedication of the shrine and consecration of the people to the Blessed Virgin Mary were held. The procession became a miniature pilgrimmage. Led by the altar boys dressed in their white cassocks, the choir and women went next, followed by the little flower girls in white carrying Our Lady's wreath and bouquets, the Chiefs carrying the statue of Our Lady to be placed in the memorial teepee, the men, and finally the Bishop attended by the deacon and subdeacon and clergy. The rosary was recited on the way to the shrine. The sermon by Father DUCHAUSSOIS was followed by the dedication and crowning ceremony, the congregation singing the hymn « Immaculate Mary », the song of the Lourdes pilgrims, with special words composed by Rev. Father AMOROUS. The shrine, designed by Father DUCHAUSSOIS, is built in the form of a teepee painted white and trimmed with blue. This stands on a slight ridge behind the Indian village. The teepee is fronted by a white — and blue — trimmed archway decorated with articles such as snowshoes, drums, guns, etc., used in the everyday lives of the Dog-Rib people. By setting trees in the ground, from the archway to and around the teepee, the people made a most attractive spot.

After saying Mass on Monday, Bishop PICHÉ left in his plane for Fort Simpson. At 10 o'clock, a requiem high Mass was sung inside, because of rain. Deceased members of Fort Rae were called to mind at this Mass and prayers were offered for the souls of all the departed. After Mass, a processional visit to the graveyard was made. A memorial cross of spruce and red artificial carnations was placed on the grave of Rev. Father TRASSARD, the only Father actually buried in Fort Rae. The cross venerated in spirit all the Sisters, Fathers and

Brothers who have given their lives to missionary work in the Dog-Rib country.

On Tuesday, Mass was held at the Old Fort. The boats, led by the mission cruiser, left Rae about one p.m. and Mass was said by Father AMOUROUS on the top Old Fort Hill about 4 p.m. Father DUCHAUSSOIS explained the reason for this visit to the Old Fort. The large wooden cross set on the top of Old Fort Hill marks the approximate site of the first Mass offered in Dog-Rib territory, 100 years ago.

If the former events of these celebrations were impressive in ecclesiastical formality, in the large number of worshippers or in the attractiveness of decoration and vestments, this final event was impressive in its simplicity and suitability to the Indian way of life. Here beneath the Cross, that true symbol of the missionary's life, with the grass and trees for walls, the summer sky for ceiling, the people knelt in a circle around the portable altar, and as the final music by organ and choir of the « Te Deum » died away there was sincere rejoicing in every heart. Then the « Immaculata » mission boat from Resolution, with Father MARREC and party, left the Old Fort to return to Resolution via Yellowknife.

The choir, formed by the Sisters and a number of local girls and women, under the direction of Father POCHAT with organist Sister PEDNEAULT, sang the Masses and hymns very well. Trained in their extra duties by Father POCHAT, the altar boys performed their parts admirably.

Visiting clergy assisting in the centennial services were Rev. Father BEAUREGARD of Yellowknife, Father LEISING of the CF-OMI with his co-pilot, Brother CLAESS, Father MARREC and Brother TURCOTTE of Resolution, and Father POSSET and Brother TURGEON of Fort Simpson. Former members of the Fort Rae community who returned for a short time

to help, were Rev. Sister LEDUC of Fort Smith and Sister PEDNEAULT of Resolution. It was a pleasure to welcome these and other visitors from Yellowknife at various points and we enjoyed having them on this happy occasion.

Although these celebrations were essentially religious in character, the temporal side of life was not forgotten. On Sunday evening, the white members of the settlement attended a buffet dinner given by the mission staff. The enjoyable affair gave folks the opportunity to meet and chat with Bishop PICHÉ and other members of the clergy and visitors attending the celebrations.

On Monday evening, a feast was given for the whole Dog-Rib band, about 1,100 in number. Materials for this feast were provided by the mission and prepared by the people in their own way. The feast was laid out in front of the church. Summoned by rifle shots when everything was ready, the people streamed in each with his own eating utensils to take part in the dinner.

The decorational theme throughout the church and various buildings was most artistic. In the church, a large siver « 100 » decorated with coloured lights was placed above and behind the altar. On either side of the « 100 », connected by gold and blue chains, were shields supporting flags and bearing the dates 1859 on the left and 1959 on the right. This motif was repeated outside on the front of the Church just above and on either side of the doorway.

Assisted by the townspeople wherever possible, the mission staff worked long days to make these celebrations the success they were and they should be justly proud of their efforts. May they have continued good health and good will to carry on so well this work started by their predecessors one hundred years ago.